

Protecting Enemy Centers of Gravity: Mounting the Intelligence Campaign

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Report Documentation Page				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
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1. REPORT DATE 2006		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED 00-00-2006 to 00-00-2006	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Protecting Enemy Centers of Gravity: Mounting the Intelligence Campaign				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Air University, Air War College, 325 Chennault Circle, Maxwell AFB, AL, 36112				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT see report					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT Same as Report (SAR)	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 8	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

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Protecting Enemy Centers of Gravity: Mounting the Intelligence Campaign

In the game *Bop the Monkey* children strike a monkey's head as it rises from a hole. As a system, the game has complete "situational awareness" relative to the rise and fall of monkey heads. Players don't know where the next monkey head will pop. Similarly, we capture terrorists when they emerge from their holes but are seldom sure where the next head will rise.

To meet our national objectives requires processes that attack terrorism holistically, not piecemeal.¹ To determine if we are on the right track requires metrics unlike those that merely quantify captures and kills. In the end, our strategy for the Global War on Terror (GWOT) must involve more than just bopping whatever terrorist head pops up. This paper proposes an asymmetric approach to fighting the GWOT that emphasizes protecting enemy Centers of Gravity (COGs) and provides a framework for developing metrics to assess progress.

What is transnational terrorism's Center of Gravity?² Some say it is Usama Bin Laden, as he not only commands the al-Qaeda network but his influence transcends the network's boundaries and incites radical Islamic fundamentalism. Hence, he should be captured or killed at the first opportunity. Counterarguments say that would make him a martyr, fueling more radicalism. Other authors note that radical extremists view the United States' inability to capture Bin Laden as a sign of "divine will" in favor of Muslims.³ Another perspective claims that the transnational terrorist COG is not an individual but rather the "extremist ideology" that permeates certain regions. Approaching the GWOT from the enemy's perspective necessitates asking, "What does the hub of the enemy's power look like *to the enemy*?"

Our national strategies see the terrorist threat as irregular, catastrophic, and disruptive.⁴ Various analyses define the enemy as unpredictable, intelligent, and willing to sacrifice his and

others' lives for his beliefs. Not surprisingly, defining the enemy asymmetrically makes it difficult to define his COG in the Clausewitzian manner, which focuses on the single "hub of all power." If the enemy cannot be defined as a single global entity, then the reductionist approach leading to a single COG is inappropriate. Instead, consider examining the enemy's "lines of communications." From the perspective of transnational, multidimensional threat operations, "lines of communications" are all threat interactions between providers and receivers of support—including information transfer, logistical relationships, financial support, motivational support, sponsorship, and recruitment.

The first step is to view these threat communications activities as Decisive Points, or gateways to the larger objective of Center of Gravity,⁵ and to determine the values within them that lead to a COG. As joint doctrine states, "...detailed operational planning should not begin until the adversary's COGs have been identified."⁶ Once the COG is determined, it must be analyzed for every form of communication emanating from it, with the end product being a construct defined by all its elements and identified as a network or a stand-alone organization. As long as a COG is active, its internal activities and relationships with parallel organizations can be assessed. Therefore, protecting enemy COGs can yield tremendous dividends by allowing analysis of entire organizations and networks, thereby increasing opportunities to determine force structure, messaging techniques, support trails, and senior leadership.

Further, as long as COGs exist and are not attacked, they will act as magnets that attract lesser actors into their spheres of influence, an advantage from an intelligence gathering perspective, given that a consolidated, more centralized force is easier to analyze and strike than a disparate one. The swift operations against Iraq in 2003 liquidated any threat "lines of communications," dissolving chances of tracking and assessing the component parts of a centralized terrorist entity.

While protecting the enemy COG can strengthen his various forms of communication and may be a short-term disadvantage for friendly forces, it works out as a long-term advantage when the threat picture has gelled enough for friendly forces to strike with strategic effects. From a joint/interagency perspective, the pivotal point may be how the Intelligence Campaign is viewed vis-à-vis the “Swift Defeat” and “Win Decisively” campaigns. By and large, the National Military Strategy presents the Intelligence Campaign as a support mechanism to phased operations. But if this campaign only supports phases, it will never attain the required primacy to fully assess transnational COGs and their associated elements.⁷ Therefore, the Intelligence Campaign that assesses transnational terrorist COGs must be at the national level, meaning DOD might find itself in a supporting role both in intelligence gathering and combat operations.

Increased analysis time will give rise to threat-based metrics rooted in various statuses and operational capabilities within a terrorist organization or network. While destroying elements of a terrorist organization provides immediate gain, what remains of the organization can adapt, and the benefits may turn out to be very short-term. An entity’s ability to carry out operations can be measured most effectively once its entire body is analyzed. Elements under fire cause the entity to adapt in ways unknown, leading to loss of situational awareness, which we are precisely trying to avoid. In other words, we want to be in the position of having measured the enemy so well that when we do strike, we will be able to forecast what adaptive techniques he will employ. Following that, we want to be able to tell when the organization or network as a whole has been terminated, which requires referencing metrics that consider the entity as a whole.

Potential threat-based metrics include types and quantity of logistics support, personnel structure, personnel movement, operational reaction times, voice and digital communications, rates of recruitment, numbers of recruits, transportation accessibility, intra/inter-organizational

points of contact, types and level of outside support, response to friendly information operations, response to denial operations, financial statuses, exploitation of host/non-host nation support, and degree of ideological commitment.

The ability to assess and quantify more effectively increases as a result of keeping COGs intact. Situational awareness is enhanced and the conditions for simultaneous attack in depth are set. While the traditional definition of simultaneous attack in depth leads to prescribed sets of hard and soft targets, simultaneous attack in depth is asymmetrically defined here as simultaneous attacks on threat COGs as well as all elements that define its infrastructure. Terrorist personnel, finance structures, logistics bases, supplies, messaging capabilities, leadership, and radical extremist ideologues are struck simultaneously because of our improved “organization in total” awareness—an awareness that resulted from a national Intelligence Campaign with the patience to step back and analyze the whole. The implication is that strikes on the threat may come in various forms—financial, military, economic. Therefore, a scenario where the Commerce Department or DOD would cue their operations off a national intelligence agency lead is quite plausible.

This awareness also serves as a critical foundation for effects-based planning and operations. Collective, global, and simultaneous attacks in depth will maximize long-term gains while minimizing ill-perceived, short-term benefits. As Clausewitz said, “...the effect produced on the center of gravity is determined...by the cohesion of the parts.”⁸ The effects of simultaneous attack in depth are the exact opposite of bopping one monkey head, only to see another pop up. So what are the strategic implications of protecting the enemy’s COG in a multinational environment? The crux of the problem comes down to the global execution of such a paradigm.

With more than 170 countries supporting the GWOT, the critical task involves bringing all GWOT supporters on board.⁹

Difficulties notwithstanding, the advantages remain clear. First, a multi-national approach to protecting enemy COGs results in increased global situational awareness. Though an operational pause in the killing of terrorists might be required, more time serves as a resource for determining additional threat communications activities, followed by longer periods of tracking. Second, by protecting and allowing threat COGs to persist inside various national boundaries, those nations have the opportunity to develop a greater depth of knowledge regarding what's going on in their own backyard, allowing for more intelligence analysis and international information sharing than the relatively short timeframe of "terrorist cell found and captured." The third advantage concerns coordinated, multiple, simultaneous strikes across all physical, digital, and other motivational fronts. When entire networks are destroyed simultaneously, the difficulties of threat adaptation increase exponentially. In other words, when all the heads get bopped at once, the machine is beaten and broken.

In the end, strategy is nothing if it is not holistic. Our national-level strategies provide the baseline from which plans, resources, and operations come together in a unified effort. But the international "reach" of our terrorist enemies requires internationally agreed upon strategies that transcend national philosophies. The GWOT must be planned and executed within the context of *Global Centers of Gravity*, and nations supporting the GWOT must focus on the types of collective and simultaneous results that handicap threat adaptation. Protecting the enemy's COGs, wherever they exist and until they can be fully exploited, sets the conditions for long-term, effects-based planning and operations and offers a viable alternative approach to eliminating all the monkey heads.

Endnotes

¹ U.S. Department of State. *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*, February 2003, p. 11. This document does not quantify the war on terrorism's end state will be. No national strategy does. This document does, however, talk about certain global conditions that should be set in preparation for final victory. Under the Strategic Intent section, it says that after global terrorist degradation and dispersion has occurred, we will localize the threat to a regional basis. "Once the regional campaign has localized the threat, we will help states develop the military, law enforcement, political and financial tools necessary to finish the task."

² Clausewitz, Carl Von, *On War*, edited by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, Princeton Press, 1984, pp 595-597. In "On War", Clausewitz saw the "...center of gravity...as the hub of all power and movement, on which everything depends. That is the point against which all our energies should be directed". For Clausewitz, a COG could be an army, a capital city, the personality of a great leader, public opinion, etc,. Regardless, once the enemy COG was recognized, continuous strikes were necessary in an effort to critically weaken the enemy. He also tells us that only by "...constantly seeking out the center of his [the enemy's] power, by daring all to win all, will one really defeat the enemy". Clausewitz also allowed for multiple "centers of gravity" when separate entities cannot be reduced to a single hub.

³ Benjamin, Daniel and Steven Simon. *The Age of Sacred Terror*, Random House, 2003, pp. 451-452

⁴ General themes underscored and weaved throughout the National Security, Defense, and Military Strategies include the international impacts of global terrorism. Impact assessments range from regional through individual nation-state.

⁵ *Army Field Manual 3-0*, p. 5-7. The Army FM describes a *Decisive Point* as a geographical place, specific key event, or enabling system that allows commanders to gain a marked advantage over an enemy. This advantage will allow the commander to greatly influence the outcome of a battle. It also underscores the importance of not confusing *decisive points* with *centers of gravity*; they are the keys or gateways to attacking them.

⁶ *Joint Publication 5-00.1*

⁷ Myers, Richard B. *National Military Strategy*, 2004, p. 3, 25

⁸ Clausewitz, Carl Von, *On War*, edited by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, Princeton Press, 1984, p. 486

⁹ Rumsfeld, Donald H. *National Defense Strategy*, March 2005, p. 2